

Sermon – 3rd Pentecost
Luke 9:51-62
June 30, 2019

“Home Sweet Home”

An internet search of the phrase *“home sweet home”* would give you nearly 300 million results. The time-honored phrase conveys the value we place on a home. Home is where we go to be ourselves, enjoy family and welcome friends. Routines, even dreaded “housework” provide rhythm to our existence. In our homes we can rise to a beverage of choice and retire to a pillow that welcomes our weary head. Entwined into the physical place we call home is the essence of home - “it’s ours, it’s me.” I’ll never forget passing through customs at New York’s Kennedy airport after 2 ½ years overseas, and when the agent looked at my passport and saw how long I’d been gone he looked at me and said; *“welcome home.”* It was golden.

Home has its reputation because every culture values it. Homelessness then is a aberration. The movement of people from one place to another has always been a reality but in the last century that movement is not so much migratory or adventurous as involuntary and traumatic. Our nation’s “border issue” is a “movement of people” issue, and opinions on what our policy should be understandably vary. The sad reality is a lot of people who flock to our Southern border would have stayed home if it had resembled anything like what we call *“home sweet home.”*

A lot of those “border people” are Christian, adding to the conflicted feelings many of us have about what to do. To place requirements on citizenship nations have every right to do, but Christianity has no official nationality and the only time I’m aware of that the Bible uses the word “citizenship” is when Paul, in Philippians says ours is in heaven. We shouldn’t overlook that in our lesson from Luke Jesus and his followers have been told by some Samaritans *“you’re not one of us”* – so move on.

But this isn’t a lesson on immigration – and the references to or inferences of “home” - there are four of them - are intended to get us thinking about what’s “ours or me” if we’d be followers of Jesus. For the Samaritans in this story what was “theirs” was centuries of bitterness toward these *“just passing through Jews”* – who thought of Samaritans as dogs by the way. We discover from them that *“Home Sweet Home”* means strength in numbers - a *“you’re on my turf now”* haughtiness that belied any spirit of hospitality they may have claimed for themselves.

‘Well all right then’ – time to shake a little dust from our sandals. Instead Jesus sounds a bit curt with someone who approaches him and wants to become a follower – telling them, with the Samaritan spurning in mind perhaps, that he might want to re-think that desire because it would require following someone *“with no place to lie his head.”* That may be, but more likely the message Jesus is driving home is that Christ-followers need a different conception of what ‘home sweet home’ really means.

I read recently of the dilemma of some Mexican-American students living on the US-Mexico border. One of them – her name is “Jocelyn” was born in America so technically “belongs to us” – she carries a US passport, but now lives with her parents in Mexico who never did. Her “address” on the US side comes thanks to an “undocumented” grandma who works as a domestic. With that in hand she attends school on “our side.” One wonders how she then, a professing Christian reads the Jesus “with no place to lie his head.” Where does she belong? Uncomfortable with the moral compromise she makes every day, she other Christian teens like her find a wall and a policy running right through the middle of their faith.

In our story, Jesus is a Jocelyn of sorts – the “*rejected on both sides of the border one.*” Does that mean we’ve got to reject home and family too? That’s the implication of “home stories” three and four. One says; ‘*I’ll follow, just let me grieve and bury my father*’ while another says; ‘*I’ll follow, just let me say goodbye and gather a few things for the road.*’ In reading these we tend to fixate on the circumstances of the invitation when we should really concentrate on the consequences of declining. These two “invitees” into the kingdom might have been random strangers Jesus simply bumped into and wanted to make a point out of.

They may also have been following him for months – years even, familiar but uncommitted faces to whom our Lord finally says “*time for a decision.*” Jesus had made his – Luke says he’d “*set his face toward Jerusalem.*” That meant only one thing – saving “would be followers” from their sins - forgiving you your moral compromises and accommodations to your complicated world – with all its customs and pleasures that day by day create a wall between you and your faith. Which side you gonna live on today – citizen of heaven?

“*Jesus, I’m happy to follow you, as long as...*” Think about that for a moment and complete that sentence for yourself. That’s the point of this lesson – not homes and families and countries that we understand correctly to be gifts of God. Not tending to and enjoying things – with the gratitude appropriate to the recipient of a gift. No, the point is to keep following, straining to understand the cost of following a Savior who set his face like flint to the cross and didn’t look back.

There is a man whose name is Abu, whose home in the Mosul district of Iraq was spray painted a few years back with the Arabic letter “n” – for “Nazarene” when soldiers of ISIS came to town. That meant it likely would never be a ‘home sweet home’ for he and his family again. Identity with Christ has these kinds of consequences for many fellow believers these days. Identity, almost as much as home, defines us.

In our culture identifying as Christian doesn’t have the consequences it did recently for Abu and his family, or does every day for Jocelyn - but identity if defined as allegiance can pinch your options for fun on Friday nights or put angry people with picket signs outside your business door. So be it - the only identity that matters is the one Jesus gives you anyway - citizens of heaven, and with it a “Home sweet Home” indeed. AMEN